

## Hispanic Catholics in the United States

About a third of all Catholics in the United States are now Hispanic<sup>1</sup> and recent studies suggest that the Latino share will continue to grow for decades.

### By the numbers:

- More than 20% of all Catholic parishes in the United States have Hispanic ministry; this is, well over four thousand parishes in the U.S. are serving Hispanic Catholics.<sup>2</sup>
- More than 80% of all Arch/dioceses have diocesan staff coordinating ministry among Hispanic Catholics.<sup>3</sup>
- Hispanics compose more than 35% of all Catholics in the United States.<sup>4</sup>
- Hispanics have contributed 71% of the growth of the Catholic Church in the United States since 1960.<sup>5</sup>
- More than 50% of all Catholics in the U.S. under age 25 are of Hispanic descent.<sup>6</sup>
- To date, 40 Hispanic bishops have been consecrated in the U.S., 27 of which remain active<sup>7</sup> and 10 are retired. They make up 6% of all U.S. Catholic bishops.
- Over the past few years 15% of all ordinations to the priesthood in the U.S. are of Hispanic descent.<sup>8</sup>
- Hispanics constitute 25% of all lay people engaged in diocesan ministry programs.<sup>9</sup>
- More than 30 million Hispanic Catholics reside in the United States today.<sup>10</sup>
- More than two-thirds (68%) of all Latinos in the United States consider themselves as Roman Catholics.<sup>11</sup>
- 44.3 million is the estimated Hispanic population of the United States as of July 2006, making the people of Hispanic descent the nation's largest ethnic or race minority (15% of total population).<sup>12</sup>
- Hispanics will surpass the 106 million mark by the year 2050 (25% of the total U.S. population projections for that year).<sup>13</sup>

### Vision:

*The National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry (1987) and its recent addendum *Encuentro and Mission: a Renewed Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry (2002)* provide a vision for Hispanic Ministry and for the Church that is evangelizing, communitarian and missionary.*

## History and Relevant happenings in recent years

Pastoral work and ministry among Hispanic Catholics in the U.S. has a rich history spreading over many generations. Its roots can be traced to the first evangelization of the Americas. The modern history of the ministry, from a national perspective, begins in 1945 when the U.S. bishops asked Archbishop Robert E. Lucey of San Antonio, to lead a Committee of Bishops on ministry efforts among a growing Hispanic population. Since then, Hispanic ministry has grown and matured greatly, and proposes to the Church a very successful pastoral model.

Hispanic Catholics have traditionally organized themselves through a communitarian, consultative, and inclusive process called "Encuentro." The first three national *encuentros* happened in 1972, 1977 and 1985. The process of *encuentro*, strengthened by the presence and support of a national office, has illuminated and guided Hispanic ministry at all levels, leading to the creation of numerous regional and diocesan structures over the years, and providing the leadership with a sense of identity and mission. All the relevant happenings locally or nationally are referred to in their collective memory as "la Memoria Histórica" (or historical memory).

More recently, led by the Bishop's Committee on Hispanic Affairs, Hispanic leadership nationwide, and in collaboration with many other departments of the USCCB and national organizations, Hispanic Catholics shared in the 2000 Jubilee Year the *encuentro* process with the entire Church of the United States. *Encuentro 2000* proposed a Catholic Vision for the Third Millennium rooted in unity in diversity. The process of Encuentro 2000 made clear the need to establish specific pastoral priorities to serve growing and culturally diverse communities.

In 2001 a National Symposium to Refocus Hispanic Ministry is celebrated in Colorado Springs, CO. The Symposium objectives were to evaluate and more fully develop Hispanic ministry and to strengthen the unity of the body of Christ in culturally diverse communities.

In 2002 The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops included recognition and affirmation of its cultural diversity as an integral part of its mission and makes it explicit within its objectives. The bilingual document *Encuentro and Mission: A Pastoral Framework for Hispanic Ministry* is published.

In June 2006 the *Primer Encuentro Nacional de Pastoral Juvenil* (PENPJH) gathered more than two thousand Hispanic youth delegates from 125 dioceses, after an eighteen month consultative process at the local level. The main event was celebrated at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana. In attendance for the dialogue were also twenty bishops, eighty priests and numerous youth ministers and adult advisors.

In 1969 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops established the Division for the Spanish-Speaking under the Department of Social Development. Only two years later the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs was established as a national office. With the USCCB restructuring process, in November 2007 the Bishops' Committee on Hispanic Affairs became a Sub-committee of the new Cultural Diversity in the Church Committee. In January 2008 the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs became the Office for Hispanic Affairs under the new Secretariat for Cultural Diversity in the Church.

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1. Pew Hispanic Center and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Release 4.25.07
2. Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs, Hispanic Ministry Study by Diocese, 2007.
3. Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs
4. Idem
5. Idem
6. Idem
7. Idem
8. Annual report 2003, 2004, 2005, Secretariat for Priestly Formation and Vocations, USCCB
9. *Lay Ecclesial Ministry: State of the question*, USCCB, 2001
10. Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs estimate.
11. Pew Hispanic Center and Pew Forum
12. U.S. Census Bureau
13. U.S. Census Bureau. Projections.